

STORYME COVID-19 EDITION – Contribution from Jo Stanbridge

Tell us how you're living today:

I'm living alone in my apartment in downtown Kingston, with my 16-yr-old cat, Charlie. Due to the current state of emergency, the library where I work is closed to the public, so I'm working 9-5 from my computer at home. My job is to help people with local history and genealogy research, so I'm answering questions by email, teaching people how to use Ancestry Library Edition, and helping to build this new section of our StoryMe oral history project, so Kingston-Frontenac residents can record and archive their experiences during the Coronavirus pandemic.

What would you be doing today if the pandemic hadn't occurred?

I would be working at the Central Branch of the library, doing similar work to what I'm doing now but much more hands-on with books, microfilm, maps and other tools. Of course I'd also be helping people in person, and holding group events. The COVID situation developed so fast that on March 10th we held a Genealogy Drop-In session with a dozen participants and three volunteers from the Kingston Branch of the Genealogical Society, all gathered around the table in the Local History Room. Just one week later we had cancelled all group events for the foreseeable future, and everyone was required to stay at home. It seemed to happen so quickly!

What's the hardest thing you're experiencing right now?

My parents are in a retirement home in Toronto and both are in frail health. I can't get there to visit them, and of course there are many worries about that whole situation, on many levels. I keep in touch with them by phone and even via "snail mail" and I talk with my siblings by email, phone and Zoom (video conferencing). I wish I could be there to help in a more hands-on way. It's strange to think that even if I did manage to get to Toronto (I don't have a car, so would have to get there by train, bus, subway) I wouldn't be allowed into the building to see them. That's hard.

What's the best thing you're experiencing right now?

I love to paint but I never seem to have time just to mess around with colour and try new things. So this stay-at-home time is giving me a chance to do that. As an added bonus, I notice that I feel less worried and more relaxed after I've been playing around with paint for a couple of hours. So I'm trying to paint as much as possible right now.

If you could send a message to someone living 10 years from now, what would you tell them?

I would say that my own personal experience of this time isn't as dramatic or scary as you might think from the news reports and media--daily life is still daily life and I don't spend the whole day coping with the COVID-19 situation...but the stay-at-home time is not as restful or boring as you might think, either! Keeping up with family and friends and work and other commitments is almost as busy as it ever was. It really makes me think about those times in history when people

were getting on with their lives while war or sickness or disasters were happening--how daily life still goes on, even in unusual circumstances.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

I'd like to share a little photo-diary of my experiences over the past few weeks. My closest face-to-face contact with anyone (while still keeping 6 feet away, naturally!) happened when a worker came to fix a big piece of eavestrough that tore off during a wind storm. I never thought I'd be social-distancing through an open window, four storeys up!